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OLDER AUSTRALIANS

INTRODUCTION

Australia's population is ageing and this is expected to continue for at least the next 50 years. In 1997, the proportion of the population aged 65 and over was 12%, compared with 8% in 1946. This older population is projected to increase to 24% by 2051. Transition to older age is often accompanied by substantial changes to people's health, living arrangements and financial circumstances. Yet there is increasing recognition that older people make a large and positive contribution to community, family and society. The United Nations has designated 1999 as International Year of Older Persons and has adopted as its focus the five principles of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

In 1997, 2.2 million Australians were aged 65 years and over (table S2.1). More than half of these were aged 65-74 years (58%) while 10% were aged 85 years and over. A higher proportion of those aged 65 and over were women and this trend increased with age. More than twice as many women as men were aged 85 years and over.

S2.1 PERSONS AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER - 1997

Category A	Men		Women		Persons	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Age						
65-74	616.5	6.7	679.3	7.3	1,295.8	7.0
75-84	298.8	3.2	434.3	4.7	733.2	4.0
85 and over	65.3	0.7	150.8	1.6	216.1	1.2
Total	980.6	10.6	1,264.4	13.6	2,245.1	12.2
All ages	9,218.0	100.0	9,314.2	100.0	18,532.2	100.0

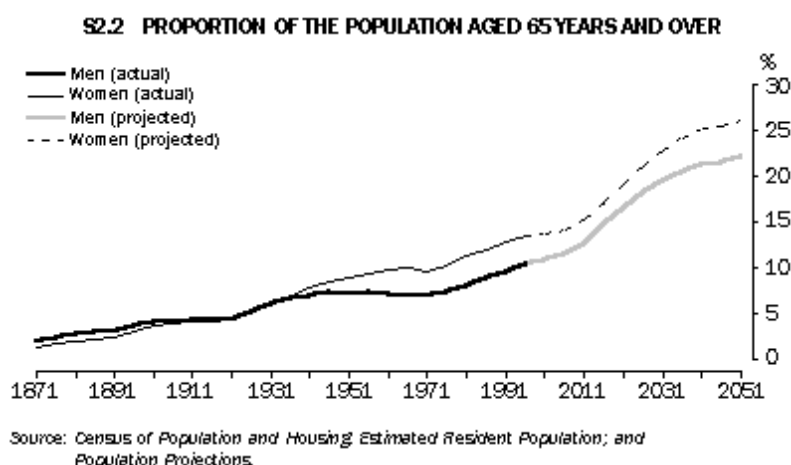
Source: Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories (3201.0).

Growth of the older population

In 1871, less than 2% of the Australian population were aged 65 years and over. Older people constituted 4% of the total population by the turn of the century, and remained at around that percentage throughout the period prior to and including World War I (graph S2.2). In 1946, the proportion of older men in the population was 7%, and that of older women was 9%.

The ageing of the population is the result of improved life expectancy throughout this century, so that more people survive past 65 years of age. Changes in the proportion of people aged 65 and over are also affected by high fertility, which produces growth in younger age groups. Most notably, after World War II the growth in the proportion of older people slowed because of the post-war baby boom. By 1996, the proportions of men and women aged 65 and over were 11% and 14% respectively. Substantial growth is projected in both the relative and absolute size of the older population over the next fifty years. By 2051, 22% of men and 26% of women (6 million people) are expected to be aged 65 years and over.

The Australian population has not aged at the same rate for men and women. This is in line with the growing difference between male and female life expectancy evident since the 1930s. Before this time, there was a slightly higher proportion of men than women aged 65 and over. This can be attributed to the gap in the sex ratio from colonial times when men of any age vastly outnumbered women. By the turn of the century the sex differential had closed for the younger age groups, but still had some impact on the older cohorts.



International comparisons

Australia's ageing population structure is part of a trend common throughout the developed world where fertility and mortality are declining. Proportions of older people in the population for Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA (all around 12-13%) have been lower than e.g. in Sweden, Italy and the UK (16-17%) (table S2.3). Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia have had low proportions of older people due to comparatively high fertility and mortality rates. Most nations have had more older women than older men.

S2.3 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS OF OLDER PEOPLE

Aged 65 and over

Country	Year	'000	% of total population	% female
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Australia	1995	2,154.3	11.9	56.5
Canada	1994	3,472.5	11.9	57.9
China	1990	62,993.4	5.6	54.5
France	1993	8,360.4	14.5	60.3
Greece	1994	1,582.1	15.2	55.6
Hong Kong	1995	590.1	9.5	54.7
India	1993	37,392.0	4.2	49.5
Indonesia	1995	7,905.6	4.1	53.5
Italy	1994	9,302.3	16.3	59.1
Japan	1994	17,586.0	14.1	59.0
Malaysia	1993	751.9	3.9	54.1
Netherlands	1994	2,020.8	13.1	60.0
New Zealand	1992	394.6	11.5	57.4
Papua New Guinea	1990	91.2	2.4	48.4
Sweden	1994	1,540.1	17.5	57.6
United Kingdom	1994	9,185.8	15.7	59.6
United States of America	1995	33,532.3	12.8	59.2
Vietnam	1992	3,490.6	5.0	58.5

Source: United Nations, 1995 Demographic Yearbook, New York, 1997.

Living arrangements

People aged 65 and over represent a group with a diverse range of needs and social resources. This is reflected in patterns of living arrangements. Most older people live with other family members or by themselves, and only a small proportion live in health establishments. However, there are differences in the living arrangements of people in their 60s compared with those in their 90s. These differences are illustrated in table S2.4.

In 1996, 46% of older people lived only with their partner, 17% lived with their partner and children or with other family members, 28% lived alone, and 7% lived in health establishments.

As people age, the likelihood of living with a partner decreases and the likelihood of living in an establishment increases. In 1996, 56% of 65-69 year olds lived with their partner only and 1% lived in a health establishment. In contrast, 5% of people aged 95 and over lived with their partner only and 61% lived in a health establishment. Most older people who lived in a health establishment were in nursing homes or cared accommodation for the retired or aged (94%). The move to health establishments reflects the increased likelihood of disability associated with

ageing.

The percentage of older people living alone also differed by age. The proportion of 65-69 year olds living alone was 20%, increasing to 36% among those aged 85-89. The transition to living alone occurs mainly because one partner dies. Of those aged 95 and over, the proportion of lone persons decreased, reflecting that many people live with their adult children or in health establishments by this age.

S2.4 PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER(a), Living Arrangements By Age - 1996

		Age group (years)								
Living arrangements	Units	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	95 and over	Total	
In private dwelling										
With partner only	%	55.5	52.8	44.5	31.9	18.7	8.5	4.7	45.8	
With other family	%	20.8	16.7	15.1	15.2	16.2	16.3	15.6	17.4	
With unrelated persons only	%	2.1	1.9	1.7	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.3	1.8	
Lone person	%	20.1	26.1	33.1	38.3	36.5	26.7	17.0	27.8	
Total in private dwelling	%	98.5	97.4	94.4	86.8	72.6	52.5	38.6	92.8	
In non-private dwelling										
In health establishment										
Nursing home	%	0.5	1.1	2.6	6.1	12.8	24.3	36.1	3.4	
Accommodation for the retired/aged (cared)	%	0.4	0.8	2.2	6.1	13.1	21.0	22.2	3.0	
Other health establishment	%	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6	1.1	1.7	2.3	0.4	
Total in health establishment	%	1.1	2.2	5.2	12.8	27.0	47.0	60.6	6.8	
In other non-private dwelling	%	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.4	
Total in non-private dwelling	%	1.5	2.6	5.6	13.2	27.4	47.5	61.4	7.2	
Total	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Total aged 65 years and over	'000	612.6	539.8	385.0	258.8	128.7	44.8	12.6	1,982.3	

(a) Enumerated at home.

Source: Unpublished data, 1996 Census of Population and Housing.

How older Australians use their time

In general, today's older people are healthier, have greater physical and financial independence than earlier generations, and have time for a range of activities not previously practicable. Retirement from the paid workforce and a change in other commitments means that older people's time use also differs substantially from time use in younger age groups.

Older people devote few hours to employment or education activities. In 1997, those aged 65 and over spent an average of two hours a week on employment activities compared with an average of 26 hours spent by those aged 15-64 (table S2.5).

The activities which were major consumers of time among older people included: personal care, domestic activities, recreation and leisure. Average time spent on personal care activities, which included sleeping, eating, drinking and health care, was greater among older people (83 hours a week) than among those aged 15-64 (77 hours a week). Older people spent an average of eight hours a week more on domestic activities (23 hours a week) than younger people (15 hours a week). Much of this time comprised housework tasks such as washing, ironing, cleaning and tidying up.

Time available for leisure is relatively high for older people because of low levels of labour force participation. On average, older people spent considerably more time on recreation and leisure activities (45 hours a week) than people aged 15-64 (30 hours a week). Much of this time was spent on passive leisure activities such as reading, watching television and relaxing.

S2.5 AVERAGE TIME SPENT ON MAIN ACTIVITIES, By Age

Main activities	Age group (years)		
	15-64	65 and over	All persons aged 15 and over
	hours per week	hours per week	hours per week
Personal care	76.7	83.2	77.6
Employment	26.0	1.8	22.9
Education	3.5	0.0	3.0
Domestic activities			
Housework	9.9	14.1	10.5
Other household work	4.9	8.4	5.4
Total domestic activities	14.8	22.5	15.9
Child care	4.1	0.5	3.6
Purchasing	5.1	5.7	5.3
Voluntary work/care			
Support for adults	0.4	0.4	0.4
Unpaid voluntary work	0.6	1.3	0.7
Total voluntary work/care	2.3	3.4	2.6
Social interaction	5.4	4.9	5.3
Recreation/leisure	29.5	45.2	31.6
Total(a)	168.0	168.0	168.0

(a) Includes undescribed activities.

Source: Unpublished data, 1997 Time Use Survey.

Caring and community activities

A substantial contribution is made by older people to voluntary work and caring activities, including child care. These activities not only meet needs within the family and community, but also provide benefits to older people themselves in terms of personal satisfaction. In 1997, the average time spent by those aged 65 and over on unpaid voluntary work for community organisations, caring for adults and helping or doing favours for family and friends was greater than that spent by people in younger age groups (three hours and two hours a week respectively). Older people spent a greater proportion of this time on unpaid voluntary work.

Across all people aged 65 and over, the average time spent on child care activities was half an hour a week, reflecting the fact that few older people are the primary carers of young children. Five per cent of older people spent a considerable amount of time - an average of 11 hours a week - on child care activities. Often this was informal care for grandchildren. Grandparents provided care in almost 70% of households which received informal care for a child aged 11 and under.

Older volunteers

In the 12 months to June 1995, almost 350,000 older volunteers gave their time to organisations and groups (table S2.6). The median time that women aged 65 and over spent in voluntary work was 108 hours, compared with 72 hours by those aged 15-64. The median time that older men gave to voluntary work was also greater than given by younger men - 104 and 72 hours respectively.

Welfare and community organisations attracted the highest levels of volunteering among older people (51%), comprising almost half the hours devoted to these organisations (42%). Older people were also more likely than younger people to be involved in religious organisations (23% of volunteers aged 65 and over), health organisations (12%), and arts/culture groups (6%).

S2.6 VOLUNTEERS, FIELD OF VOLUNTARY WORK AND HOURS WORKED BY AGE - 1995

Field of voluntary work	Age group (years)					
	15-64		65 and over		Total	
	Persons	Hours	Persons	Hours	Persons	Hours
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Sport/ recreation/ hobby	33.3	26.7	18.9	14.0	31.4	24.5

Welfare/ community	26.5	20.9	51.3	42.4	29.7	24.7
Health	6.2	4.5	11.6	10.7	6.9	5.6
Emergency services	5.3	4.1	2.1	0.7	4.9	3.5
Education/ training/youth development	28.4	16.6	5.2	3.8	25.3	14.3
Religious	16.8	16.0	23.4	18.8	17.7	16.5
Environmental/ animal welfare	3.9	3.2	2.7	1.8	3.7	2.9
Business/ professional/ union	3.5	2.1	1.5	*0.8	3.3	1.8
Law/justice/ political	1.7	1.0	1.1	*0.3	1.7	0.9
Arts/culture	3.8	3.5	5.9	4.3	4.1	3.6
Foreign/ international	0.8	0.5	0.7	*0.8	0.8	0.6
Other	1.3	1.0	3.0	1.8	1.5	1.1
Total fields of voluntary work(a)(b)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All volunteers	'000 2,291.2	Hours (million) 356.2	'000 348.3	Hours (million) 77.7	'000 2,639.5	Hours (million) 433.9

(a) Field of voluntary work was only collected for up to three organisations for each volunteer. Hours worked in organisations not collected were excluded from the total fields.
(b) As a volunteer can work in more than one field of voluntary work, the percentages for individual fields of voluntary work add to more than 100%.

Source: Unpublished data, Survey of Voluntary Work.

References

Voluntary Work, Australia (4441.0).
United Nations, 1995 Demographic Yearbook, New York, 1997.

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